

## **Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program**

### **Government response**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Government thanks the committee members for their report into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP). The MPTP is an important service for Victorians with limited mobility and a critical part of ensuring our transport system is accessible to all.

The Government continually seeks to improve the MPTP and other accessible public transport services.

The Government is pleased to note that the committee has found the Victorian Government's changes to the MPTP since 2017 have led to greater choice for MPTP members. However some concerns have been raised.

The Committee recommended that the Government consider raising the lifting fee for wheelchair accessible vehicles to encourage existing operators to remain in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program, and incentivise new wheelchair accessible vehicle operators in the Program. The Victorian Government has announced that it will increase the MPTP lifting fee paid to drivers of wheelchair accessible commercial passenger vehicles. The lifting fee paid to the drivers of wheelchair accessible vehicles by the government was increased by more than 20 per cent from \$21.80 to \$26.80 from 1 July 2022.

The Victorian Government has also acted to make it easier for drivers and operators of taxis and rideshare operators to access the crucial information and services they need to deliver safe and high-quality services across the state. From 1 July 2022, Safe Transport Victoria (ST Vic) united the functions of Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria (CPVV) and Transport Safety Victoria (TSV), to create a new regulator to manage safety, compliance, accreditation and registration for commercial passenger vehicles, buses, and the marine sector. Combining the knowledge and experience of our regulatory experts from these key industries will deliver better safety outcomes for our operators and all Victorians who use these essential transport services.

The Government's response to the specific recommendations of the committee are set out below.

### **Response to Specific Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation 1**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria identify and address ongoing issues regarding data management with the Multi Purpose Taxi Program. Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria should report to the Minister for Public Transport within six months of this report being tabled to outline:**

- **where the weaknesses in data management are occurring within the organisation**
- **what actions have been taken to rectify the problems.**

This recommendation is supported in principle.

Data management is a critical capability for ST Vic. The Victorian Government has acted to unite the functions of CPVV and TSV in ST Vic. Bringing the two regulators together will strengthen existing resources and allow experience and skills, including in data management as part of the MPTP, to be shared and improve. While ST Vic will not follow

the specific process recommended by the Committee, ST Vic will take into account the findings and recommendations of the Committee as part of this improvement process.

## **Recommendation 2**

**To ensure that the Data Collection Provider Expansion Project is meeting its aim to be open, transparent and fair to all potential providers, Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria should undertake regular consultations with applicants on their view of the process. In particular, Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria should:**

- **consult with applicants on opportunities for improving support during the application process**
- **establish consistent project timelines, including indicative turnaround times for Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria to provide feedback/progress reports. These timelines should be clearly communicated to applicants.**

This recommendation is supported and ST Vic does consult with applicants and establish and communicate project timelines as part of the Data Collection Provider (DCP) Expansion Project. ST Vic meets with both DCP Applicants and those service providers that express interest in becoming a DCP in order to provide further information about the application process and provide support through the Invitation To Supply Procurement Process.

## **Recommendation 3**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria commission an independent survey of Multi Purpose Taxi Program members' experiences using Uber.**

This recommendation is supported in principle and ST Vic will capture MPTP member experience as part of surveying the broader industry seeking holistic feedback of the MPTP.

## **Recommendation 4**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria undertake an audit to assess whether the expansion of services operating under the Multi Purpose Taxi Program has led to:**

- **a significant decrease in services due to market dilution reducing profit**
- **drivers prioritising peak periods where profits are higher, leaving off-peak periods under-serviced.**

**If the audit shows substantial risks to the ongoing viability of the Multi Purpose Taxi Program, the Government should, in consultation with industry stakeholders, immediately develop and implement a mitigation strategy.**

*and*

## **Recommendation 5**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria:**

- **undertake an audit of the number and location of wheelchair accessible commercial passenger vehicles currently operating in Victoria and report its findings within three months**
- **work with booking service providers and owner-drivers to undertake an audit of the number and locations of wheelchair accessible vehicles that were in operation during the six months from October 2021 to March 2022**

- **implement a process to accurately capture data on the number and location of wheelchair accessible vehicles in operation (at least 1 trip per calendar month) in the market on an ongoing basis.**

*and*

#### **Recommendation 7**

**Should a decrease in the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles operating in Victoria become evident, that Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria act immediately, in consultation with commercial passenger vehicle industry stakeholders, to ensure numbers are sustainable and sufficient to meet community needs. This action may include requiring a set percentage of a commercial passenger vehicles operator's fleet to be wheelchair accessible vehicles.**

Recommendations 4, 5 and 7 are supported in principle.

The Department of Transport will undertake a review of the supply and location of wheelchair accessible vehicle CPV services with support from ST Vic, which will consider the issues expressed in all three recommendations. The review will inform the Department's advice to the Minister for Public Transport.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**That the Victorian Government work with the commercial passenger vehicle industry and other Australian governments to achieve the response times for accessible taxi services requirement in line with the Commonwealth Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.**

This recommendation is supported. Transport providers and operators have multiple responsibilities under State and Federal legislation to ensure that we protect people's fundamental human rights and do not discriminate. The Commonwealth Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 is a legally binding standard that mandates minimum levels of compliance.

Since October 2017, the total number of registered wheelchair accessible vehicles in Victoria has increased from 637 to 947 (as at 30 June 2022) with average wait times for WAVs significantly reduced. The impact of accessible vehicle supply on response times will be further considered in the Department of Transport's review referred to in response to Recommendations 4,5 and 7 above.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That the Victorian Government consider raising the lifting fee for wheelchair accessible vehicles to:**

- **encourage existing operators to remain in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program**
- **incentivise new wheelchair accessible vehicle operators in the Program.**

This recommendation is supported.

The Victorian Government has acted on concerns about the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles and increased the MPTP lifting fee for wheelchair accessible vehicles by more than 20 per cent, from \$21.80 to \$26.80, from 1 July 2022.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria consider options to develop and implement 'preferred supplier' accreditation for service providers that consistently achieve best practice approaches to accessible transport service provision. This**

**accreditation should be subject to ongoing independent quality assessment measures.**

This recommendation is not supported. ST Vic's investigation and enforcement powers mean that can take action in the event that any service provider does not meet stringent safety standards, does not comply with the law or is not a fit and proper person to provide services in Victoria.

**Recommendation 10**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria finalise, release and implement a new Driver Training Framework as soon as possible.**

This recommendation is supported, and ST Vic will finalise a new Driver Training Framework as soon as possible, taking into account feedback already received through public consultation. It is acknowledged that work on a new framework did not progress within the timelines originally planned, with response to COVID-19 requiring a significant diversion of staff effort in the past two years.

ST Vic continues to support enhanced driver capability in transporting passengers with disability through its disability awareness campaign – *You make the difference*. More than a third of drivers surveyed said that it has changed their views on transport passengers with disability.

**Recommendation 11**

**That the Victorian Government require all commercial passenger vehicles that operate in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program to install a security camera compliant with specified standards.**

This recommendation is not supported.

CPVs that are registered to provide unbooked services are already required to install a compliant security camera. There is no prohibition on the installation of security cameras in booked only vehicles. The Commercial Passenger Vehicles Industry Act introduced a comprehensive safety duties regime that places obligations on all industry participants, including booking service providers, vehicle owners and drivers. Providers of both booked and unbooked services have duties to ensure the safety of services and will need to respond accordingly to safety risks as they change over time. Providers have the option to use security cameras as part of the approach to providing safe services, or alternatively use other technologies and business models tailored which may be tailored to the needs and preference of passengers. Many service providers also provide the ability to share journey tracking through an 'app' with friends or family, and a capacity to contact emergency services directly through the mobile booking 'app'.

**Recommendation 12**

**That the Victorian Government review and implement a consistent set of minimum vehicle safety and accessibility requirements to apply to all vehicles that operate in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program.**

This recommendation is supported in principle, and the CPVI Act 2017 introduced a comprehensive safety duties regime that places obligations on all industry participants, including booking service providers, vehicle owners and drivers. Providers of both booked and unbooked services have duties to ensure the safety of services and will need to respond accordingly to safety risks as they change over time. Where appropriate, specific

requirements continue to differ between vehicles registered to deliver booked-only services and those registered to deliver unbooked services.

### **Recommendation 13**

**That the Victorian Government ensure the best interests of Multi Purpose Taxi Program members are protected to ensure they can access the most suitable options for their personal circumstances, in particular Multi Purpose Taxi Program members who do not have the personal capacity to make decisions about their own travel arrangements.**

This recommendation is supported, and ST Vic supports members regardless of individual needs and capacity. Carers, companions or family members may travel in the vehicle with the MPTP member, and a carer may keep the MPTP card in their possession.

### **Recommendation 14**

**That the Victorian Government consider introducing a maximum fare for Multi Purpose Taxi Program trips for all service providers. The maximum should not be greater than the fare set by the Essential Services Commission.**

This recommendation is not supported.

In accordance with the *Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017* (CPVI Act), the ESC regulates maximum unbooked taxi fares for trips that begin in metropolitan Melbourne or the Urban and Large Regional Zones (which covers most of metropolitan Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Frankston, Dandenong, and the Mornington Peninsula).

Therefore unbooked MPTP trips are already subject to the ESC's maximum unbooked taxi fare regulation. The ESC released its most recent decision on maximum fares for unbooked taxi trips on 6 September 2022.

While most MPTP trips are delivered by vehicles that are registered to deliver both unbooked and booked services, most MPTP trips (including the vast majority of wheelchair accessible vehicle MPTP trips) are booked trips. Booked MPTP trips are requested by phone or online, and under the CPVI Act booked trips are not subject to maximum fare regulation by the ESC. There is no evidence that this has contributed to unfair pricing for MPTP customers when they book their trips, including mobility device users requiring wheelchair accessible vehicles. Introducing a maximum fare across all unbooked and booked services statewide could impact the supply of services and outweigh the benefits of a fixed maximum fare. Therefore the recommendation is not supported.

### **Recommendation 15**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria undertake a review of complaints handling processes in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program. The review should:**

- **consider how the processes can best be improved to promote greater accessibility, responsiveness and positive outcomes for people with a disability**
- **consider whether complaints handling for the Multi Purpose Taxi Program should be centralised and managed by Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria**
- **be undertaken in consultation with the disability community and the commercial passenger vehicle industry**
- **be finalised with recommendations for improvement within 12 months.**

This recommendation is supported in part, and ST Vic will review its complaints handling processes in the MPTP so that cost-effective improvements will be made wherever

possible. ST Vic also auditing the broader safety systems of large booking service providers, including on matters such as complaints management.

The Department of Transport host the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee (ATAC), which is made up of six members and a chair with lived experiences who ensure an integrated focus on whole-of-journey accessibility across all key policies in the transport portfolio, including commercial passenger vehicles and the MPTP.

### **Recommendation 16**

**That Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria review and, where necessary, update application processes for the Multi Purpose Taxi Program to:**

- **ensure proactive communication on application outcomes is built-in**
- **provide a mechanism for support coordinators/advocates to liaise with Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria if required**
- **simplify requirements to obtain a replacement card**
- **improve guidance to medical practitioners.**

This recommendation is supported, and ST Vic will continue to seek cost-effective ways to improve its processes as part of continuous business improvement efforts.

### **Recommendation 17**

**That the Victorian Government work with other Australian States and Territories to implement a nationally consistent approach to transport subsidy programs.**

This recommendation is supported in part. Achieving a nationally consistent approach to transport subsidy programs is not likely to be feasible, however the Victorian Government will continue work with other jurisdictions on meeting the needs of Victorians, including by streamlining reciprocal processes wherever possible.

Reciprocal arrangements exist across Australia. Under the current arrangements this means passengers need to request vouchers that can be redeemed in other jurisdictions, in advance of travel. The Government accepts that this can be inconvenient. However the existing arrangements in place in other jurisdictions are very different reflecting different administrative systems, geography, and available support programs, which means full harmonisation would be complex and very costly.

### **Recommendation 18**

**That the Victorian Government advocate to the National Disability Insurance Agency for the National Disability Insurance Scheme to provide subsidised transport for all clients that supports social connection and participation in the community.**

### **Recommendation 19**

**That the Victorian Government continue to work with the National Disability Insurance Agency to ensure that the roll out of transport funding under the National Disability Insurance Scheme ensures wheelchair users receive equal services to all other transport users, including the retention of wheelchair lifting fees for commercial passenger vehicles.**

Recommendations 18 and 19 are supported.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Transport and Department for Fairness, Families and Housing, are working with the National Disability Insurance Agency to confirm how eligible users will receive transport support through the NDIS. During this time, there will be no change to the way users access their subsidy. In addition, wheelchair accessible taxi operators and drivers will continue to be paid the lifting fee.

## Recommendation 20

**That the Victorian Government requires commercial passenger vehicle drivers that undertake Multi Purpose Taxi Program work to get a National Disability Insurance Scheme Worker Screen Check. In implementing this requirement, the Government should establish a clear transition plan for the industry in line with the transition plan it established for other industries under the Victorian Safety Screening Policy: for registered NDIS providers operating in Victoria.**

This recommendation is not supported, as driver check requirements for the NDIS are a matter for the NDIS program. All applications for CPV driver accreditation already require a National Police History Check. ST Vic also conducts ongoing monitoring with Victoria Police on a weekly basis. The Victorian Government will continue to support driver training as part of the MPTP that will support the future quality and depth of potential supply of CPVs for the NDIS now and in future. As noted in response to recommendation 10 above, ST Vic continues to support enhanced driver capability in transporting passengers with disability through its disability awareness campaign – *You make the difference*. More than a third of drivers surveyed said that it has changed their views on transport passengers with disability. The majority of MPTP members are not in the NDIS and any additional regulatory costs on CPV drivers (who may deliver MPTP and non-MPTP trips) may discourage drivers from delivering MPTP services. Whether or not CPV businesses choose to be NDIS service providers is a commercial decision for those businesses.